

# Healthy Diet

You may have been asked to stick to a heart-healthy diet. This is a reduced-calorie, low-fat diet that prevents cholesterol from forming plaque in your blood vessels.

## Heart-Healthy Diet

A plant-based diet is an essential part of heart-healthy eating. This includes more fruits and vegetables, whole grains like whole-wheat bread, brown rice, and oatmeal, nuts/seeds/legumes, plant-based foods like soya, tofu, chickpeas, beans, and plant-based meat substitutes. These foods have a lot of fiber and high water content, which keeps you full and regular.

You don't need to become vegan or vegetarian, to have more plant-based foods. You just need to make smarter meat and dairy choices. Schedule in a few meat-free days during the week. Replace red meat with lean meats (fish, chicken without skin, turkey).

Canada's Food Guide recommends filling half of your plate with fruits and non-starchy vegetables of all different colors, one-fourth of your plate with a protein and the other one fourth with a starch, such as whole grains, sweet potatoes, corn, and other starchy vegetables.

Heart-healthy eating may also mean substituting high-fat processed (prepared) foods for low-fat natural alternatives. Here are some practical tips:

Remember that ALL oils are high in calories, and you should use as little as you can to cook your meals. Some fats and oils are better than others. Bad fats like coconut oil, butter, and ghee, should be avoided entirely. These are saturated fats, solid at colder temperatures, tend to build up in your blood vessels, and can cause heart attacks. Good fats - like olive oil and canola oil, are unsaturated fats, liquid at room temperatures, and are better for your heart health. Don't deep fry your food. Use cooking methods that require less oil, like baking, air-frying, steaming, and boiling.

Whole fat dairy products such as regular milk, ice cream, and cheese have a lot of fat. Replace whole-fat dairy with skim milk, Greek yogurt, skim cheese like mozzarella, or plant-based versions of milk, ice-cream, and cheese.

Choose healthier snacks. An apple, a cup of berries, 10-15 nuts, a few celery sticks with a teaspoon of peanut butter, hummus on a whole-grain toast are all excellent choices. Remember, if you don't bring it home, you won't be able to eat it. You might be tempted by snacks like chips, cookies, and cakes. Resist putting these things into your shopping cart. A moment of self-control while shopping can make your choices at home easier and healthier.

Don't drink your calories. Soda pop, fruit juices, and alcohol have a lot of calories and might be causing you to gain weight or not being able to lose weight. If you're drinking alcohol routinely, cut down by scheduling in alcohol-free days during the week.

There might be some foods you are finding hard to give up. It's not all or nothing, however. Allow yourself a less healthy snack occasionally. Add a tablespoon of ice-cream to a bowl of fruit, not the other way around. Spread a small spoon of Nutella onto a whole-grain toast, instead of a big spoonful on a bagel. Replace regular soda pop with diet pop.

Don't try to make too many changes all at once. Slowly substitute or eliminate unhealthy foods from your diet. Flavor your food by adding herbs, spices, vinegar, lime, or lemon juice to help you enjoy your meals. Set your table and take your time. Savor every bite. This is known as mindful eating and helps you stay aware of how much you are eating.

## Action Plan

- Eat more fruits and vegetables of all different colors
- Substitute red meats with lean meats and fish
- Cut down on fried foods, and use as little oil as possible in your cooking
- Cut down on high-fat dairy products
- Choose healthier snacks
- Cut down on sugary drinks like juices and soda pops.
- Slowly reduce unhealthy foods a step at a time from your diet.
- Use Canada's Food Guide to help control portion sizes

## Links

[Canada's Food Guide](https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/) - <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

[How to Read a Food Label](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/understanding-food-labels.html) - <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/understanding-food-labels.html>

[The Portfolio Diet](https://www.stmichaelshospital.com/media/hospital_news/2018/0706.php) - [https://www.stmichaelshospital.com/media/hospital\\_news/2018/0706.php](https://www.stmichaelshospital.com/media/hospital_news/2018/0706.php)

[Healthy eating](https://www.heartandstroke.ca/healthy-living/healthy-eating/healthy-eating-basics) - <https://www.heartandstroke.ca/healthy-living/healthy-eating/healthy-eating-basics>

[Eat Whole Grain Foods](https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/healthy-eating-recommendations/make-it-a-habit-to-eat-vegetables-fruit-whole-grains-and-protein-foods/eat-whole-grain-foods/) - <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/healthy-eating-recommendations/make-it-a-habit-to-eat-vegetables-fruit-whole-grains-and-protein-foods/eat-whole-grain-foods/>